Chapter 2
Beyond Conscience: Judaism in the Philosophy of Pierre Bayle

Adam Sutcliffe

Abstract Interpretations of Pierre Bayle's attitude to Judaism differ enormously, mirroring the more broadly divided nature of recent Bayle scholarship. It is meaningless, this essay argues, to categorise Bayle as either an 'antisemite' or a 'philosemite'. Jews occupy a uniquely anomalous and complicated place in his work because they are figure centrally in his explorations of the philosophical question that most preoccupied him: the inescapable incommensurability of faith and reason. The ensnarement of Jews and Judaism is here investigated across four key areas: Bayle's approach to the Old Testament (or Jewish Bible); his coverage of early modern Jews in his *Dictionnaire*; the place of Judaism in his arguments for toleration and the rights of conscience; and the persistence of Judaic themes in his most intensely contested late writings.

Keywords Pierre Bayle · Judaism · Conscience · Toleration · Spinoza · Jean Le Clerc

Scholarly assessments of Pierre Bayle's attitude to Judaism reflect in microcosm the divided state of Bayle interpretation in general. Just as critics cannot agree on whether Bayle was fundamentally a secular rationalist, a conflicted but committed Protestant, or the holder of some intermediate or hybrid position between these two extremes, a wide range of characterizations have also been put forward of the underlying nature of Bayle's approach to Judaism, Jewish history and Jews. According to Richard Popkin, a pronounced affinity with Judaism is apparent in Bayle's writings. In his inner heart, Popkin speculated in the introduction to his selective translation of the *Dictionnaire*, Bayle might have been 'a Judaizing Christian, or a genuine Judaeo-Christian, or even a secret Jew' (1991, xxvi). Miriam Yardeni, in contrast,

A. Sutcliffe (✉)
Department of History, King's College London, London, UK
e-mail: adam.sutcliffe@kcl.ac.uk

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has argued that Bayle was in essence 'anti-Jewish', because he regarded Judaism as inherently morally deficient. While not finding Bayle personally guilty of antisemitism, Yardeni nonetheless charged him with opening up an intellectual road towards this prejudice, along which, on her account, Voltaire and d'Holbach later travelled without hesitation (1980). Lorenzo Bianchi, in a more measured essay on the subject, has argued that Bayle's critiques of Judaism, because they are historical rather than racial, are not 'radically anti-Jewish', and are in any case outweighed in significance by his commitment to universal toleration (1994).

How should we make sense of these widely diverging assessments? The place of Judaism in Bayle's thought and work has been an area of controversy because the stakes on the topic are high, and the broad terrain is confused. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment is widely regarded as culminating with the extension of political rights to religious minorities in the wake of the French Revolution, when the case of the Jews, both immediately in 1789 and over the course of the extremely protracted ensuing process of what became known in the 1830s as 'Jewish Emancipation', gave rise to uniquely intense discussion and debate. Jewish political inclusion was closely followed, though, by the rise of modern political antisemitism. In the light of this, the Enlightenment has been interpreted as the indispensable origin of the ideas that enabled Jewish inclusion and cultural flowering in the modern era, but also as an intellectual bridge between the religious antisemitism of premodern Europe and the later rearticulation of this prejudice in secular form.[1] As a foundational thinker of the Early Enlightenment, Bayle has been inserted by historians into both these overarching narratives.

Bayle is widely admired, of course, as one of the most sophisticated and passionate early advocates of toleration. In his *Commentaire philosophique* (1686)—his most direct and extensive engagement with that issue—he specifically included Judaism in his argument for the toleration of religious sects of all stripes (CP: OD II, 419). In his Bible criticism, though, Bayle focused with devastating relentlessness on the moral shortcomings of the Jewish heroes of the Old Testament. His witty but pointed *Dictionnaire* articles on biblical characters stand at the head of what developed into a barbed eighteenth-century tradition of irreligious polemic advanced through the ridiculing of Judaism (Sutcliffe 2003b). His 'David' article, which particularly outraged the Walloon Consistory of Rotterdam, was indeed a source for both Voltaire and d'Holbach, who reworked Bayle's arguments into their far more unambiguously anti-Judaic writings (Vercruysse 1978). The political and rhetorical legacy of Bayle with respect to Jews is, then, not clear-cut.

It is, though, intellectually fruitless to seek to categorize Bayle as either philosemitic or antisemitic, or as having been in essence positively or negatively disposed to Jews or Judaism. Rotterdam in the late seventeenth century hosted communities of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews: in 1690 around 80 Jewish families in total,

[1] For an overview of the place of Judaism in Enlightenment thought, see Sutcliffe 2003a; for a sharply critical interpretation of this relationship, influential at the time of its publication though now largely discredited in scholarly debate, see Hertzberg 1968; on the conceptual and political history of 'Jewish Emancipation' see Sutcliffe 2018.

or approximately 400 individuals, resided there (Israel 2002, 96). It was predominantly a commercial centre, where, as in Amsterdam, the local Jews were disproportionately active and visible in the economic bustle that continually intersected with the cultural and intellectual life of the city (Van Lieshout 2008). Bayle, then, would certainly have encountered a broad variety of Jews in the course of his everyday life. There is no evidence, though, that these encounters made any particular impression on him. The lives of his Jewish fellow-immigrant neigbours do not seem to have stirred his curiosity. Bayle's extensive surviving correspondence, which fills 15 volumes in the recently completed scholarly edition published by the Voltaire Foundation, confirms the impression of him as a figure embedded above all in his own cultural network of the Huguenot diaspora. Elizabeth Labrousse's annotated list of his known correspondents is densely populated with Huguenot pastors, and does not include a single Jew (Labrousse 1961, 329–406). Bayle, we must conclude, was not actively interested in Jews or Judaism as a living reality in his own time. His was extremely interested, though, in the ways in which Jewish-related themes or examples could sharpen key philosophical arguments.

In Bayle's mind, most fundamentally, Jews occupied a uniquely anomalous position in relation to the philosophical question that preoccupied him throughout his life: the inescapable incommensurability, as he saw it, of faith and reason. Moral thinking, as presented in his writings, requires constant tacking between these two perspectives, which are each repeatedly shown to be insufficient on their own but irreconcilable with the other. Jews alone, as conceived by Bayle, stood outside this eternally inconclusive state of shuttling between reason and faith. As the recipients of God's directly revealed and legally authoritative Word, their religious and intellectual lives were uniquely unfractured. Reason and faith did not strain against each other for Jews, or at least they should not do so, because all aspects of Jewish life and law were directly subject to the authority of divine revelation.

An exploration of the place of Jewish themes in Bayle's work, then, while it certainly should form part of any survey of the wider mosaic of his cross-cultural curiosity and intellectual cosmopolitanism, also offers an exceptionally penetrating perspective on his wider philosophical thinking. This topic sharply elucidates his conception of the relationship between faith and reason, and especially of the role of conscience in navigating this. These issues stand at the heart of his arguments on toleration, and particularly valuable insights are therefore yielded by considering his approach to Jews and Judaism in the context of that key Baylean concern. The Jewish case, in summary, serves as a uniquely illuminating and challenging testing ground for the conceptual and political boundaries of Bayle's thought.

2.1 Bayle and the Old Testament

How interested was Bayle in Judaism? Richard Popkin rightly observed that, given the unique and unprecedented opportunities for interaction between Christians and Jews in the Dutch Republic in this period, it is notable that Bayle evinced no

particular interest in theological discussion with living Jews. There is no trace in his writings, for example, of the 'friendly conversation' between the Remonstrant theologian Phillip van Limborch and the Sephardic doctor Orobio de Castro, van Limborch's account of which was published in 1687 in nearby Gouda (Popkin 1996, 635–6). Bayle was keenly interested, however, in Jewish history and in works of Hebraist scholarship. All of the Dutch francophone literary journals of the late seventeenth century gave prominent coverage to Hebraic subjects, but the *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* under Bayle's editorship (1684–7) paid them particularly close attention: there was, on average, at least one review of a Jewish-related book in each monthly issue (Sutcliffe 2003a, 33). An important conduit of knowledge for him in this area was his close friend Jacques Basnage, to whom he left most of his belongings in his will. Basnage, who may well have played a significant role in spurring Bayle's early interest in biblical criticism, was during Bayle's final years hard at work on his pioneering multi-volume *Histoire des Juifs*, which was published by Rainier Leers in Rotterdam in 1706, the year of Bayle's death (Bernier 2017, 245–6; Israel 2019, 481; Sutcliffe 2003a, 81–2).

Bayle's own facility with the Hebrew language was minimal, but he nonetheless grappled seriously with rabbinic texts, using Christian Hebraist reference sources as a guide. H. H. M. van Lieshout has counted 10 references in the *Dictionnaire* to Giulio Bartolocci's vast four-volume *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica* (1675–93), the most recent and comprehensive Hebraist project of the period (Van Lieshout 2001, 231). His attitude to rabbinic writings, however, was far from respectful. A critique of 'rabbinical fantasies' is a recurrent theme in the *Dictionnaire*, featuring frequently in the notes of his articles devoted to Old Testament figures, which mostly draw attention to the moral failings of those individuals. There are 21 such articles in the *Dictionnaire*, which constitute, according to Elizabeth Labrousse's calculations, 1% of the entries in the work (Labrousse 1964, 333). This is not a vast proportion, to be sure; but it is not negligible either, particularly when seen in the context of the intentional eclecticism of the *Dictionnaire*, which was one of the means through which Bayle conveyed his implicit argument that the boundaries of knowledge were inherently unfathomable and unruly. The contrast with Bayle's much lighter coverage of the New Testament, also noted by Labrousse, is certainly significant. Bayle devoted only two articles to New Testament topics (on John the Evangelist and the Sadducees). His biblical commentary was overwhelmingly focused on exploring the moral laxity displayed in the Jewish scriptures.

The typical pattern of Bayle's double-pronged critiques of the Old Testament and of rabbinic literature is established in the very first article of the *Dictionnaire*: on Aaron, 'high priest of the Jews, and brother of Moses'. In the third sentence of this article, Bayle offers this dry judgment on his subject: 'I would simply say that his weakness in lowering himself to the superstitious desires of the Israelites in the affair of the golden calf has given rise to many lies' (DHC, Aaron). In the remark here appended—the first remark of the work—Bayle elaborates on this by cataloguing the various 'rabbinical chimeras' that have been devised to exonerate or minimize Aaron's responsibility for this episode of idolatrous worship (DHC, Aaron, A). This article is paradigmatic of Bayle's biblical critique, the typical structure of

which was to observe the moral failings of the ancient Hebrews and their revered leaders as recounted in Scripture, and then to expose the incoherence of later attempts, both by rabbis and by Christian theologians, to explain and excuse this behaviour.

The most famous and detailed example of this line of argument is the lengthy article on King David, which so scandalized his peers that Bayle bowed to the demands of the Walloon Consistory and cut the most provocative passages from the *Dictionnaire*'s second edition. Bayle here exposes with wit and relish the dramatic discord between David's great status and closeness to God, and his licentious, merciless and deceitful behaviour. He condemns with particular vigour David's conduct on the battlefield, which made the cruelty of modern warfare—even that of the Turks and the Tartars—seem mild in comparison (DHC, David, H).[2] In slaughtering the Amalekites following their raid on the town of Siceleg, Bayle tells us, David and his entourage 'did not let their swords rust … they killed men and women mercilessly, leaving only their cattle alive. … Frankly, this behaviour was very bad' (DHC, David, D).

Bayle's scrutiny of David's behaviour leads him to swiftly to the philosophical problem that lies at the heart of his engagement with Judaism and the Old Testament: the clash between reason and faith. This emerges here in the dissonance between the self-evident immorality, when judged on any rational basis, of David's behaviour, and the lofty status that he nonetheless retains for Christians, on the basis of faith in the divine provenance of the biblical record. In places Bayle seems to be attempting to mitigate this clash. On the slaughter near Sicileg, he comments that had David been acting under explicit divine orders it would not be appropriate to describe his behaviour as inhumane, but in this case it is clear that there was no such divine command, and that David himself was responsible for his actions (DHC, David, D). The underlying puzzle, though, remains. It is essential, Bayle argues, that morally wrong actions are condemned as such even when they are perpetrated by figures such as David who have been recipients of divine inspiration. There can be no middle path: either actions such as his are wrong, or similar actions committed by other people are not wrong. Attempts to argue otherwise are incoherent, and undermine the authority and clarity of moral standards. They thereby 'do great damage to the eternal laws, and consequently to true religion' (DHC, David, I).

Other articles intertwine a similar moral critique of the Old Testament with a more philosophically complicated probing of the dissonance between faith and reason, and of the uniquely anomalous status of Judaism in relation to this dissonance. The entry on Abimelech, for example—the Philistine king encountered by both Abraham and Isaac in the Book of Genesis—engages with the scriptural narrative on multiple levels. In the core article, as was typically his practice, Bayle's exegesis appears only mildly unconventional. Was it indeed the same Abimelech, he ruminates, to whom both Abraham and Isaac falsely presented their wives as their

[2]The lettering of remarks for this article follows the first edition (1697). In the expurgated version of the article that was included in subsequent editions, the lettering of the retained remarks was altered.

sisters? In the earlier incident, according to Genesis, Abimelech then took Sarah as his own wife, and would have deflowered her were it not for the miraculous intervention of God, who appeared to Abimelech in a dream and commanded him to restore her to her rightful husband Abraham. Bayle holds Abraham responsible for this narrow escape, noting that he could have avoided all risk if he had truthfully presented himself at the outset as Sarah's husband (DHC, Abimelech). In an early remark, he is scathingly critical of the interpretation that God had protected Sarah by afflicting Abimelech with a mysterious disease the rendered him impotent: this claim, according to Bayle, originated with Josephus and was reiterated by later rabbinical commentators. 'In am not surprised by the fantasies that the Jews have spouted over this episode', Bayle wrote, observing that he would have been more surprised if they hadn't 'created a hundred chimeras about our Abimelech' (DHC, Abimelech, B).

Attacks on the fantastical nature of rabbinic biblical commentary were part of the rhetorical stock-in-trade of seventeenth-century Christian Hebraism. Bayle frequently echoed these charges in entirely conventional terms. For him, though, these allegations were an early argumentative step in his reworking of biblical criticism as material for his philosophical exploration of the multidimensional tension between faith and reason. His next step in this process was typically to push reason as far as it can go as an alternative hermeneutical strategy. Abimelech's sexual restraint with Sarah, he suggests, was no miracle, but a simple instance of the diminution, with age, of the lusts of youth. Quoting a saying of 'young libertines', Bayle notes that 'a time comes when one is too wise' (DHC, Abimelech, D). Elsewhere, in a remark to his article on Sarah herself, he returns to this same issue, and offers another rational explanation: monarchs at the time, he comments, had so many wives that even very beautiful ones were seldom enjoyed by their husbands (DHC, Sarah, C).

In Bayle's hands biblical criticism here becomes a terrain for candid and even mildly bawdy discussion of the extent and limits of male sexual desire. This is one of the many aspects of what Mara van der Lugt has described as 'the obscenity of Pierre Bayle', which was among the main charges levelled at the *Dictionnaire* by the Walloon Consistory. Bayle's obsecenity, she shows, was intentionally provocative, and an important component of his wider campaign against euphemism, double standards, and all other forms of intellectual evasion and dishonesty (Van der Lugt 2018a). With respect to the Bible, this provocation takes on a further significance. Interpreting Scripture through a rational lens, Bayle normalizes the Jews and other Near Eastern peoples who populate its narrative, presenting them as subject to the same lusts as anybody else. As with the ethical failings of David, though, this sits awkwardly alongside the revered status of the Bible, according to Christian faith, as a divinely underwritten and uniquely authoritative record of ancient Jewish history. Bayle's mischievous sexual candour here also mischievously highlights the dissonance between critical and faith-based approaches to Scripture.

In his Abimelech article Bayle reinforces this point not through further analysis of the biblical text, but by pursuing his criticism of Josephus. In a remark on the relationship between sacred and profane history, he comments that he has long felt indignant towards this Roman-Jewish historian, and also towards those who had

failed to note and criticize a fundamental contradiction between his life and work: 'a man, who openly professes Judaism, a religion founded on the divinity of Scripture, dares to recount matters differently from how one reads of them in Genesis; he changes, he adds, he supresses the circumstances; in a word, he sets himself in opposition to Moses, in such a way as one or other of them must be a false historian' (DHC, Abimelech, C). Bayle here charges Josephus with doing what no Jew should do: contradiction of the revealed word of God. Judaism is founded on the divine revelation of Scripture—and for a Jew to undermine this is to violate their covenant with God. As a historian, Bayle makes clear, Josephus behaved perfectly normally. All ancient historians, he observes, have taken similar liberties with their sources: 'they have stitched supplements to them, and, not finding the facts developed and embellished in them in accordance with their own imagination, they have extended them and adorned them as they pleased; we accept all this as history' (DHC, Abimelech, C). As a Jew, however, Bayle finds Josephus guilty, in using these normal historiographical methods, of violating the fundamental essence of Judaism.

Interpreters of Bayle inclined to see dissimulation as the keynote of his writing might perceive this accusation as self-evidently absurd, and therefore intended not to implicate Josephus as a 'bad Jew' but to undermine the religious starting-point that leads to this flawed and intolerant judgment. By demonstrating how traditional belief in the divine authority of the Bible leads to the unavoidable conclusion that Josephus cannot be accepted as a historian despite being a typical example of one, Bayle exposes—according to this interpretation—the ridiculousness that follows from that religious outlook. It is impossible to exclude this reading categorically, and indeed at some level is surely does form part of Bayle's intended implication. He clearly does suggest that there is something absurd about Josephus, or of any other Jew, not being eligible as a historian of their own people. It is unsustainable, though, to take this as Bayle's only or primary argument. His approach to the Bible, in this article and elsewhere, is too richly textured and intricate to be plausibly interpreted as simply one of veiled ridicule. It is unlikely that interpretive consensus on Bayle's religious orientation will break out among scholars any time soon. Careful attention to Bayle's handling of Jewish matters in passages such as this one, though, strongly bolsters the case for taking seriously his interest in the paradoxes of religious faith.

Bayle's cultural milieu throughout his life was French Protestant, except during his brief spell in Toulouse as short-lived convert to Catholicism in 1669–70. His loyalty to this community following his reconversion to Protestantism came at considerable personal cost: not only exile from France, but also, as Bayle saw it, the sequence of events that led to his beloved brother Jacob's imprisonment and death in 1685. These biographical facts are themselves sufficient reason, as Hubert Bost has argued, for interpreting his approach to the Bible, and to Jews and Judaism, in the context of the attitudes of his associates and allies in his Huguenot world (2012, 187–91). His close friend Jacques Basnage, as we have noted, was deeply interested in Jews and their past—but the conceptual framework of his *Histoire des Juifs* was conventionally Protestant in theological terms. Basnage chided those who had been

gratuitously cruel towards Jews. He endorsed, however, the view that their exile and suffering was a divinely ordained punishment for their rejection of Jesus, and also believed in the inevitability and messianic importance of their ultimate conversion to Christianity (Basnage 1716; Sutcliffe 2003a, 82–9).

Bayle's thinking on the Bible was clearly far more subtle and philosophically probing that Basnage's. It is difficult to imagine, that he could have sustained such a close friendship with him, as well as very warm relations with many others who shared Basnage's conventional Calvinist outlook, if he did not sustain some respect for their committed faith in the Bible's textual authority. Bayle's painstaking engagement with the Bible, and with the problem posed by its apparent endorsement of unethical behaviour, also surely only makes sense if he believed that the authority of the Bible was not something that could be casually dispensed with. Jews, both within the biblical narrative itself and as later heirs of its most absolute authority, stood for Bayle as emblematically caught within the paradoxes generated by the incommensurable indispensability of both reason and faith.

2.2 *Early Modern Jews in the* Dictionnaire

Bayle's interest in Judaism was not restricted to the biblical era. Several articles in the *Dictionnaire* are devoted to Jews from the recent past, including some to near contemporaries. Ambiguities of identity fascinated Bayle, and he was particularly interested in the figure of the convert, perhaps because of his own personal experience of conversion both to and from Catholicism. He devoted one article to a possible convert from Judaism to Protestantism—the early seventeenth-century Hebraist Johann Rittangel—and another on a certain convert from Judaism to Catholicism: the sixteenth-century doctor, Paul Weidnerus, who ultimately became a professor of Hebrew at the University of Vienna, as did Rittangel in Königsberg (Popkin 1996; Van der Wall 1988). In a remark on the Wiednerus article, Bayle wrote with passion on the internal torment and externally inflicted suffering experienced by converts. Emphasizing converts' communality of experience, whether converting from Judaism to Christianity or between Christian denominations, he exhorted his readers not to forget 'a truly terrible type of persecution: of those who change their communion' (DHC, Weidnerus, A). As so often in the *Dictionnaire*, a philosophical provocation lay behind this point. The truth or falsehood of the confession joined by a convert, Bayle here unspokenly suggested, was irrelevant to the difficulties they were likely to experience, and also to the extent to which these challenges were deserving of understanding and sympathy.

The most subtle exploration of the complexities of conversion in the *Dictionnaire*, however, focused on a particularly tangled case of failed coming to terms with Judaism. This is found in the 'Acosta' entry, on Uriel da Costa: an early seventeenth-century Portuguese New Christian, who migrated to Amsterdam and joined the recently established Sephardic community there, but was expelled from it following his publication in 1623 of his *Exame das tradições phariseas*, an uncompromising

critique of rabbinical authority (Costa 1993). Originally from Porto, Da Costa underwent circumcision in Amsterdam as part of the process of affiliating with his ancestral religious tradition, but it then took him only a few days, Bayle tells his readers, to realize that the customs and rituals observed by his fellow Jews did not conform to the Mosaic Law, and were enforced by rabbis who displayed 'neither heart nor pity' (DHC, Acosta). Bayle here clearly invites sympathy with Da Costa and his critical insights, which he sets in contrast to a stock Christian portrayal of spiritually sterile and intellectually dishonest rabbinism.

In his account of the rest of Da Costa's life, though, Bayle's focus shifts to the same theme as in his 'Weidnerus' article: the cultural isolation and mental anguish of the convert. Expelled from the Amsterdam Sephardic community, Da Costa (on Bayle's account) took refuge in Hamburg, where he was also ostracized by the local Sephardim. His religious opinions then further radicalized, to the extent of questioning the authority of the Mosaic law itself. Later, however, he recanted his opinions, and was subjected to a humiliating ritual of readmission to the Amsterdam community. Vividly evoking the mental agonies that led to this recantation, Bayle offers his readers his own imagined version of Da Costa's internal monologue at this juncture in his life, wrestling with the pain of isolation from his community and also, due to language barriers, from everybody else in his unfamiliar environment (DHC, Acosta).

In the remarks appended to this article, though, Bayle's probing of Da Costa's case leads beyond the emotionally wrenching but philosophically fairly straightforward terrain of the psychic perils of breaking with one's religious community. In general, as we have noted, Bayle considers this issue in ecumenical terms: these perils are the same regardless of the truth or falsehood of the religion an individual might be joining or leaving. With respect to Da Costa, though, Bayle ultimately pursues a different argument. This comes most clearly into focus in the article's final remark, in which Bayle comments on Da Costa's tragic death: shunned and despised even after abasing himself before the Amsterdam Sephardim, he committed suicide in 1640. Bayle here presents Da Costa's life as a vivid warning against pursuing philosophy too far, to the point of questioning revelation itself:

> Acosta […] serves as an example. He did not want to acquiesce to the decisions of the Catholic Church, because he did not find them in accordance with reason; […] next, he rejected a myriad of Jewish traditions, because he judged them to be unknown in Scripture; […] finally, he denied the divinity of the books of Moses, because he judged that natural religion did not conform with the ordinances of this legislator. If he had lived another six or seven years, he would perhaps have denied natural religion, because his miserable reason would have found some difficulties with the hypothesis of providence and of the free will of an eternal and necessary Being [DHC, Acosta, G].

Linking Da Costa to his central philosophical preoccupation of the relationship between faith and reason, Bayle observes that there is nobody who can unerringly use reason without the need for assistance from God. Without this assistance, reason is 'a misleading guide'. Da Costa's life, for Bayle, eloquently exemplified the dangers of unrestrained rationalism, progressing, in his case, from a reasonable critique of rabbinism to the rejection of fundamental religious truths without which it was

impossible for him to lead an intellectually coherent and emotionally happy existence. Bayle concludes this final remark by drawing this resonant moral from Da Costa's sad fate: 'Philosophy first refutes errors; but, if one does not stop it there, it attacks truths, and if one lets it do as it wishes, it goes so far that it loses its bearings, and can no longer find anywhere to stop' (DHC, Acosta, G).

Why does Bayle choose Uriel da Costa as his peg on which to hang this reflection on the dangers of untrammelled reason? The story was a recent and relatively local one, and it had recently been brought to renewed public attention in Bayle's 'Republic of Letters' by the publication of Costa's ostensible autobiography as an appendix to Van Limborch's account of his 'friendly conversation' with Orobio de Castro (Costa 1687). This volume was promptly reviewed in the *Histoire des ouvrages des savans*—the successor journal to Bayle's own *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, edited by Jacques Basnage's brother, Henri Basnage de Beauval—and was Bayle's key source for this article. It would be wrong to conclude, though, that Da Costa caught Bayle's eye simply because his case was currently in the air, and that a similarly radical Christian deist might have served his philosophical purposes just as well. Da Costa's Jewishness enabled Bayle to suggest sharply distinct subversive arguments with respect to Christianity and to Judaism. The first step of Da Costa's intellectual journey—his rejection of the rabbis 'pharisaic' authority—would raise the hopeful expectation among Bayle's readership that he would then embrace the truth of Christianity, which was of course conceived as being founded on precisely this realization. In showing that Da Costa's reason did not lead him to this religious destination, Bayle's underscores his core argument that Christian belief is not grounded on reason, but on faith. Judaism, though, as conceived by Bayle and his Early Enlightenment contemporaries, was a religion not of reason or of faith, but of obedience to law. Da Costa's further radicalization, in which he lost his belief in the authority of that law, leaves him entirely lost. It is because Da Costa lacks the antidote to unchecked reason—faith, implicitly conceived here as intrinsically Christian, in contrast to Jewish legalism—that his fate is so tragic and disastrous.

The longest article in the *Dictionnaire* is devoted to an even more recent and much more renowned renegade from the Amsterdam Sephardic community. Spinoza was 8 years old at the time of Da Costa's suicide, and although his early influences remain unclear it can safely be assumed that he would have acquired detailed knowledge of the older heretic's arguments prior to his own communal expulsion in 1656. Bayle's 'Spinoza' article is also arguably the work's most influential, as reading between the lines of Bayle's extensive critique of Spinoza's arguments was one the most accessible ways in the early eighteenth century of gleaning a sense of what those dangerous arguments actually were. The paradox at the fore of this article was that of the 'virtuous atheist', of which Spinoza, both in his unblemished life and his calm and fearless death, was presented by Bayle as the supreme example. This popular image of Spinoza, which endures to this day, was diffused in the Enlightenment era above all by this article (Israel 2001, 298–301).

Bayle presents Spinoza's life as divided into three segments: he was 'a Jew by birth, and afterwards a deserter from Judaism, and lastly an atheist' (DHC, Spinoza).

Following his final embrace of atheism, Bayle seems to suggest, Spinoza's distance from Judaism was somehow categorically greater than it had been simply by virtue of his exit from his birth religion in 1656. The notion that the intellectually mature Spinoza was in no sense any longer a Jew was also present in the earliest biography of him, by Jean Maximilien Lucas, a Huguenot who had also been an admiring member of his circle. Very clearly for Lucas, and more subtly for Bayle (for whom Lucas was an important source), there was an echo between Spinoza and an earlier Jew who, it was believed, had rejected and transcended the narrow dogmas of his people. The image of Spinoza as the archetypical virtuous atheist became associated in the eighteenth century with the elevation of him by some to a status implicitly analogous to Jesus for the emerging age of reason: as, in effect, the messiah of the Enlightenment (Lucas 1927; Sutcliffe 2000, 2003a, 133–47).

Bayle's relationship to this image, though, despite having been such a key propagator of it, was complicated. Despite his admiration of Spinoza's character, Bayle's condemnation of his philosophy was, as Elizabeth Labrousse noted, exceptionally vehement by the standards of his normally playful and genial writing (Labrousse 1964, 198). The systematicity and unwavering certainty of Spinoza's marriage of atheism with geometrical reasoning appeared to Bayle as not only in some respects absurd but also profoundly hubristic and dogmatic. Bayle objected most fervently to Spinoza's rationalist dogmatism, which he perceived as the most fundamental and dangerous characteristic of the Spinozistic system of thought (Sutcliffe 2008, 70–76).

Geneviève Brykman is right, then, to note that in this article it is not Spinoza that Bayle puts on trial, but human reason (Brykman 1987–88, 269). Reason is also on trial in the 'Acosta' article, and it is by no means a coincidence that Bayle twice chooses to make this case with heretical Jewish exponents of reason as his foil. In both articles, and in Bayle's thinking more broadly, Judaism stands in antithetical contrast to reason. The two individuals with whom the articles are concerned are however conceived as standing in sharply contrasting relationships to their ancestral religion. Spinoza, whose uncompromising rebellion from Judaism, like that of Jesus, amounts to a radical inversion of the ancient religion's fundamental flaw, is in Bayle's eyes not simply an ex-Jew but an anti-Jew: the opposite of his former self. Da Costa, in contrast, did not make this exceptional leap. He remains, as understood by Bayle, still within the bounds of his Jewish particularity, and still subject to the unique regime of divine obedience that comes with it. From Bayle's perspective, this anomalous regime, which binds the Jews to God and to their divinely revealed law, is for Christians a mystery of faith. He highlights a similar mystery in his approach to the Old Testament: the immorality of David and others that is recounted and not condemned there must be in some sense confronted in its puzzling awkwardness, and not casuistically explained away. In contrast to Spinoza, whose systematic rationalism and atheism somehow flips him out of the Jewish orbit altogether, Da Costa's use of reason to critique the Mosaic law places him, alongside Josephus, in the category of 'bad Jew'.

2.3 Judaism, Toleration, and the Rights of Conscience

Bayle was fundamentally preoccupied by the issue of toleration. Some recent scholars, reacting against the earlier tendency to frame his thought around issues of reason and belief (or unbelief), have powerfully argued that we should regard toleration as his central underlying theme throughout his career, from his first writings in the early 1680s through to his late polemics against Jean le Clerc and his fellow *rationaux* in the years before his death in 1706 (Hickson 2013; García-Alonso 2019). The impact on him of both political and personal events in the autumn of 1685, as Labrousse and others have highlighted, were of transformative importance in imbuing this issue with urgency and tragedy. In November of that year, less than a month after Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes, Pierre's beloved older brother Jacob died in French government custody in the Pyrenean town of Pamiers, where he had been held for over 5 months. Bayle was convinced that his brother had been held as a surrogate target for himself, and was therefore beset with a sense of responsibility for Jacob's death (Labrousse 1963, 198–9). This traumatic event was surely crucial in cementing in Bayle his profound sense of the unfathomability of any conceivable order of divine justice, or of any conceivable rationalization of evil: Bayle's own best efforts to speak truth to power had led only to intensified hardship and expulsion for his Huguenot peers in France, and to the death of his own brother. Jacob's death also entrenched Pierre's commitment to pacifism, which, we can surmise, he saw as the only viable strategy for avoiding such horrors. For Bayle, as Mara van der Lugt has aptly summarized, 'war … was the greatest of evils; peace, the highest good' (2016, 116).

This perspective set Bayle apart from the mainstream mood in the Huguenot diaspora, which was one of incensed anger toward the oppressiveness of Louis XIV's regime. The first extensive Huguenot exploration of the idea of toleration was Henri Basnage de Beauval's *Tolérance des religions* (1684), published in Rotterdam, perhaps in large part thanks to Bayle's efforts, while its author was still in France. The tone of this essay is for the most part vehemently polemical. Basnage de Beauval rails against the violent zeal of the French Catholic Church, against which he contrasts the stoic and honourable peacefulness of the Huguenot community (de Basnage 1970; Labrousse 1963, 216). Despite ostensibly advocating religious toleration, it is hard to see how, given his implacable fury towards Catholicism, the younger Basnage imagined that toleration might be extended beyond narrowly Protestant confines. Pierre Jurieu, meanwhile, responded to the Revocation with bellicose rage underwritten with a theologically conviction of righteousness. In his *L'accomplissement des prophéties* (1686–88), he argued the triumph of the true Church over the evil of popery was a biblically foretold inevitability. The intolerance of the French was abominable, for Jurieu, because it consitututed the persecution of truth by falsehood. Uncompromising intolerance of Catholicism, however, was not only politically justified but divinely commanded (Bracken 2001).

In his *Ce que c'est que la France toute catholique sous le règne de Louis le Grand* (1686), Bayle himself delicately juxtaposed, in letter form, two contrasting

Huguenot responses to the Revocation: polemical outrage and pragmatic moderation. It was not until his *Commentaire philosophique*, though, the first two parts of which appeared a few months later in the same year, that Bayle put forward his consolidated case for toleration, drawing together a range of ideas that he had explored in his earlier works (Laursen 1998, 204). He structured his argument around a refutation of the literal interpretation of Jesus' words in Luke's gospel: 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled' (Luke 14:23). Since Augustine's original exegesis, this prooftext had been widely invoked as a justification for coercing heretics back to the true faith. Strenuously repudiating this logic, Bayle here argues for the toleration of all sects, on the sole condition that they pose no threat to the state. He allows for no exceptions to this, and explicitly includes Jews among the religious communities that ought to be tolerated (CP: OD II, 419–20).

The key principle underpinning Bayle's argument in the *Commentaire*, as many commentators have noted, is the paramountcy of conscience (Kilkullen 1988, 59–105; Bost 1994, 51–62; Mori 1999, 273–304). He opens his text with a detailed defence of the necessity of basing all understanding on the inner insights of the individual 'natural light' (CP: OD II, 363). For Bayle, the inner voice of conscience is the voice of God, and therefore must in all circumstances be obeyed. The violation of this principle is so self-evident than it could only be accepted by someone bordering on insanity: 'as long as a man is not raving mad, he will not consent to anyone being able to command him to hate his God and to scorn his laws clearly signalled by conscience and intimately engraven in the heart' (CP: OD II, 384). In rebuttal of the argument, espoused most prominently by Jurieu, that a distinction must be made between the toleration of truth and of falsehood, Bayle insists that 'a conscience that is error has the same rights as one that is not' (CP: OD II, 422). The individual, he argues, is always morally bound to follow the dictates of their conscience, regardless of what these dictates might be, and whatever their religious basis.

This commitment leads Bayle to an immediate problem. What of those who believe that their conscience requires them to persecute others? This was in effect the argument of Louis XIV and his supporters, whose Catholic beliefs affirmed their sense that they were obliged to extirpate the heresy of Protestantism in France. Bayle does not flinch from this issue, and explicitly accepts this this troublesome conclusion: 'I do not deny that those who are actually persuaded that it is necessary to extirpate sects in order to obey God are obliged to follow the stirrings of this false conscience'. He adds, though, two important caveats. 'It does not follow that they what they do by conscience is not a crime', and moreover 'this does not mean that we do not have to speak out loudly against their false maxims and endeavour to enlighten their spirits' (CP: OD 430–31).

This shift of argumentative ground, far from representing the collapse of Bayle's case for toleration, as Walter Rex long ago influentially argued (Rex 1965, 184–5), in fact marks its philosophically crucial and characteristically Baylean inflection point. Anticipating his repeated highlighting in the *Dictionnaire*, as we have noted, of the ultimate insufficiency of human reason, Bayle here argues that reason cannot conclusively undergird the case for the principle that he felt was more important

than all others: tolerance. Reason must here operate in awkwardly incommensurable tandem with faith. It is as an assertion of moral values, grounded in religious faith and therefore impervious to rationalist attack, that Bayle declares that religious persecution, even if carried out in accordance with personal conscience, is stained with 'crime' (he uses the French word 'crime', which has religious overtones of 'sin'), and therefore 'false'. In support of this swerve to the assertion of faith-based morals, he puts forward an analogous claim with respect to the regulation of sexuality. He does not need to be detained by the argument that someone might preach, in good conscience, in favour of sodomy and adultery, because this would never happen, and if anybody did 'preach sodomy' they would by met with such immediate public horror that they would never gain a band of followers (CP: OD 431). Bayle presumably made this digressive point in order to reinforce the alignment of his argument on toleration with his readers' broader moral intuitions. The distance from twentieth-first century secular norms of what be conceived as self-evidently sinful, though, highlights the extent to which his moral outlook was shaped by seventeenth-century Calvinism.

The significance of religion in Bayle's philosophy is underscored by his exceptionalist treatment in the *Commentaire* of the relationship of Jews to the dictates of conscience. He embarks on this topic in the very first chapter of the work, in which he stresses that the Old Testament falls within the purview of his argument. The Mosaic Law, he asserts, is fully compatible with the insights of the universal inner light, while also extending beyond it. For the Jews, both in Moses' time and since, these laws have served as a supplement to the inner light of conscience, dependent on it and as authoritative as it, just as deductions in geometry carry the same authority as the axioms from which they are derived (CP: OD II, 369). To elucidate this, Bayle discusses the case, discovered by him in the writings of the thirteenth-century French bishop and scholastic philosopher William of Auvergne, of a group of medieval Jews who renounced Judaism because they came to believe that the Mosaic Law was nothing more than an assemblage of useless or absurd precepts, unsupported by any divine authority. Bayle is sharply critical of these Jews' apostasy. He judges them guilty of disregarding both 'the incontestable proofs of divinity which God himself had entrusted through Moses' and the 'good reasons' for their ceremonial laws, given 'the character of the Jews and their penchant for idolatry' (CP: OD II, 370).

Despite, then, Bayle's general insistence on the absolute paramountcy of individual conscience, Bayle nonetheless unreservedly condemns these Jews who followed their consciences in choosing to abandon Judaism. In this case, the rights of conscience are overridden by the authority of the Mosaic revelation, which, Bayle reminds his readers later in the *Commentaire*, is 'a general law for the Jews, enunciated absolutely and without restrictions of time or place' (CP: OD II, 408). Whereas for Christians the key source of divine and ethical knowledge is the personal inner light of conscience, for Jews this is trumped by the divinely revealed Mosaic Law, which placed the Jews under a 'theocratic government', which abrogated 'the immunities of conscience' (CP: OD II, 408).

The unique nature of God's direct revelation through Moses functions in the *Commentaire*, as in the later *Dictionnaire*, as the key and inescapable reminder of the insoluble mysteries of both faith and reason. God's suppression of the rights of conscience for the Jews, as part of the divine intimacy of God with this chosen people, constitutes in Bayle's eyes the most vivid possible testimony to the unfathomability of faith and of its relationship to reason. For from seeking to occlude this problem, he confronts it directly, and pushes it to its most challenging limit. Noting that the Mosaic Law allowed absolutely no toleration for idolators or false prophets, was it not also possible, he rhetorically asked, that the God of the New Testament might have commanded a similar intolerance towards heresy? Bayle's response to this argument is blunt and unflinching: 'I avow in good faith that this is a powerful objection, and seems to be a sign that God wants us to know almost nothing with certainty, through the exceptions He has placed in Scripture for almost all the common notions of reason' (CP: OD II, 407).

Bayle's deepest intellectual commitment was to the avoidance of any form of dogmatism. Religious arguments over rigid tenets of doctrine, he was convinced, could only lead to entrenched conflict and violence rather than to peace. His anti-dogmatic argument for toleration, though, in no sense disarmed him in his battle against his adversaries, among whom Jurieu, and his increasingly strident anti-Catholic dogmatism, was at this time moving to the fore. The clear commitment of Bayle's own conscience to intellectual openness, pragmatism and peace rather than fanaticism and war underpinned his passionate critique of Jurieu's worldview across the remaining 20 years of his life. In the *Dictionnaire*, he railed passionately against several historical figures, such as Savonarola and Comenius, whom he cast as 'fanatics' and would have readily identified by his readers as surrogate targets for Jurieu (Laursen 1998, 206–13; Van der Lugt 2016, 145–8). More recent readers, often eager to heroize Bayle as an early herald of inclusive liberal toleration and as an enduring valuable contributor to the philosophical arsenal against modern forms of fanaticism, have mostly ignored the exclusion from his conscience-based argument for toleration of Jews, whose political inclusion has since the late eighteenth century been widely seen as a fundamental hallmark of moral decency.

Bayle's belief that Judaism was incompatible with individual conscience—which he goes out of his way to highlight in the *Commentaire*, and also reiterates elsewhere, such as (in slightly different terms) in his comments discussed above on Josephus and on Uriel da Costa in the *Dictionnaire*—highlight two important aspects of his broader thinking. Firstly, we are reminded that Bayle, like most Enlightenment thinkers before the 1780s, did not give Jews serious consideration in relation to issues of practical politics, but tended instead to contemplate them as an essentially timeless conceptual thinking tool, tightly associated with the Bible and often figured as a foil to reason (Sutcliffe 2003a, 193–261; Sutcliffe 2020, 66–80). Secondly, the evidence that Bayle placed on the anomalousness of the Jewish case highlights the importance to him of signalling the central importance of the mysterious incommensurability of faith and reason. Twenty-first-century readers readily overlook these passages, because the interpretation of the Bible counts for little for most of us. For Bayle's contemporaries, in contrast, the question of how to read the

Bible was existentially crucial, and it was through his treatment of the Jewish case that Bayle wove that question into his wider hermeneutical and political arguments. If we read his work through seventeenth-century eyes, with close attention to his handling of the Old Testament and its Jewish custodians (as Bayle saw them), we more clearly perceive how Bayle's paradoxes of faith and reason bound his approach to toleration into his broader philosophy.

2.4 Late Bayle: Conscience in Conflict

Bayle's *Commentaire*—which he published anonymously, and never publicly acknowledged as his own—was soon attacked from all sides. Jurieu denounced the work as an anti-Calvinist denial of true religion, and firmly rejected the concept of freedom of conscience. Less fiery but argumentatively similar attacks came from Jurieu's more moderate opponents, such as Élie Saurin and Jean Le Clerc, who concurred that Bayle's position implied an indifference towards religious truth, and was therefore profoundly dangerous (Mori 1999, 286–95). Bayle now found himself in the position in which he would remain for the rest of his life: of being bitterly critiqued from two opposing sides.

This sense of intellectual isolation was greatly compounded by the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which Bayle, almost alone in Huguenot circles, bitterly opposed. For Jurieu, who eagerly assumed the role of house theologian to William of Orange's invasion of Britain, this hugely portentous event, nipping in the bud the emergence of a Catholic centre of power in London, presaged the impending triumph of Protestantism over Louis XIV's France. Bayle was horrified by this prophetic warmongering, and by the blurring of theocratic partisanship with politics that underpinned it. He saw the overthrow of James II as an act of political sedition. James, he noted, had not required Protestants in Britain to abandon their faith. On the contrary: he had committed to a policy that defended freedom of conscience. The Protestant backers of the Glorious Revolution had refused to accept this, preferring instead to restore their own supremacy (García-Alonso 2019, 808–9). Bayle's non-partisan analysis of the religious politics of the Glorious Revolution was rejected not only by Jurieu and his camp, who openly embraced the Revolution's denominational partisanship, but also by Huguenot moderates, who sought to rationalize it away. Intellectuals such as Jean Le Clerc were closely allied with John Locke, whose hugely influential writings played a key role in presenting the Glorious Revolution as a triumph not of Protestant factionalism but of objectively reasonable good sense.

Locke's writings on toleration, which lent philosophical support to the Toleration Act passed by the English Parliament very soon after the Revolution, were central to this philosophical makeover. Scholarly attention has understandably focused on Locke's arguments for the political toleration of dissenting Protestants, but not of Catholics—but the unstable foundations of Locke's thinking on this issue are most sharply brought into relief by his handling of the question of toleration for Jews. In

the first few lines of his *Letter concerning toleration* Locke frames his topic in explicitly Christian terms, as 'the mutual toleration of Christians in the different professions of religion' (Locke 1991, 14). Later, though, almost in passing, he declares himself in favour of extending toleration universally, to both Muslims and Jews. He defends this, though, on Christian theological rather than reasoned philosophical grounds: 'if we may openly speak the truth … neither Pagan, nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the commonwealth because of his religion. The gospel commands no such thing' (Locke 1991, 51). Swiftly challenged on this specific point by Jonas Proast, Locke shifted his ground. In his response to Proast, he reiterated his support for the toleration of Jewish worship, but defended this for conversionist reasons entirely unrelated to his wider theorization of toleration. It is a Christian duty, he argued, to pray every day for the conversion of Jews to Christianity, but this cannot by achieved by driving Jews away or persecuting them. The casual slipperiness of Locke's arguments on Jews reveals how marginal this question was to his more concrete thinking on intra-Christian toleration. It also highlights a more fundamental instability in the relationship between Locke's philosophical and theological thinking. The political issue of the toleration of Jews sat at the boundary between those domains, and Locke was unable to situate it clearly in either of them (Sutcliffe 1999, 2003a, 218–20).

Like Bayle, Locke grounded his argument for toleration on the primacy of conscience, which occupied a similarly foundational position in the philosophical and religious outlook of both men. Locke also shared Bayle's belief that Judaism stood uniquely outside the otherwise universal reach of the rights of conscience. Again like Bayle, he considered it necessary to state this clearly in the context of enunciating his theory of toleration. 'The commonwealth of the Jews, different in that from all the others, was an absolute theocracy', he declared, explaining that the Mosaic law, as divinely authored civil legislation, was absolutely binding for the people to whom it applied (Locke 1991, 39). Locke made this point in order to demarcate the boundary between his conscience-based theory of toleration and a theological domain where it was off limits. The religious world of the Old Testament—and implicitly also Judaism *in toto*, understood as a fossilized survivor from that era—was ceded by Locke to the jurisdiction of religion. The domain of Locke's liberal philosophy of individual rights, underwritten by the primary of conscience, was thus saved from the hubris of appearing to displace entirely the idea of supreme divine authority over human affairs.

Unlike Locke, Bayle did not believe that any such tidy demarcation was possible. Christian faith, even though sharply distinct from the Judaism of the Old Testament, nonetheless rested on a continued faith in the voice of divine authority recorded in the Jewish scriptures. Human reason, meanwhile, could not free humanity from the need for faith, as he had vividly demonstrated by showing, in the *Commentaire*, how appealing to the rights of conscience could not provide the basis for a watertight case for toleration. Bayle's turn, in the 1690s, to his *Dictionnaire* project was motivated by a desire not simply to explore this fundamental intellectual puzzle, but also, at a more important moral level, to challenge the evasiveness of those who thought it could somehow be sidestepped or ignored, and the arrogance of those

who thought it could be transcended. It was precisely this arrogance that Bayle saw in both of the rival intellectual camps of the Huguenot diaspora: Jurieu and the religious fundamentalists, who asserted the absolute authority of faith, and Le Clerc and the *rationaux*, who affirmed that faith could be fully resolved with reason. Bayle's repeated use of Jewish examples in the *Dictionnaire* to highlight the the clash between faith and reason was one of the means through which he simultaneously challenged both these camps.

In Bayle's final works—his *Continuation des pensées diverses sur la comète* (1704), the four-part *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial* (1703–1707), and the posthumously published *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste* (1707)—this critique moved centre stage. These are his most adversarial writings, directed in particular against Le Clerc and his fellow *rationaux*, whose arguments, he had come to believe, were ultimately no less dangerously dogmatic than Jurieu's explicitly intolerant religious zealotry. Bayle's biting attacks on Le Clerc's rationalist theology were in response to the intellectual intolerance of the *rationaux* towards Bayle's most provocatively heterodox arguments, on topics such as Manicheanism, in the *Dictionnaire*. Le Clerc, Bayle pointed out, not only deemed intolerable not only those arguments, but also by implication any argument that failed to recognize the harmony of religion and reason. This amounted to a refusal to tolerate almost everybody (EMT: OD IV, 31). In these late works, Bayle relentlessly sought to expose the intolerance and dogmatism of his adversaries, and thus to demonstrate the necessity of his own alternative: unflinching intellectual honesty and humility.

Recent Baylean scholarly debate has revolved around these late works, from which it is tempting to seek to distil a definitive argumentative climax that offers a clearly defined 'useable Bayle' for our own times. Michael Hickson has argued, for example, that Bayle's final work, the *Entretiens*, provides the key to his resolution of the problem of evil, achieved by conceptualizing toleration itself as a theodicy (Hickson 2010, 560–67). Gianluca Mori, in contrast, has interpreted Bayle as becoming less interested in religious pluralism and moving closer to explicit non-belief, presenting with great intellectual sympathy, in the *Continuation*, the contours of a rationalist, eternally questioning 'Stratonist' atheism (Mori 1999, 217–36). Neither of these interpretations, though, account for the anomalous place of the Old Testament and of Judaism in his thought. Bayle's exploration of Stratonism, and also his experimentation with the dialogue form through the voices of Maxime and Thémiste, were above all attempts to push the boundaries of non-dogmatic thinking. Reading these late texts as reaching towards a final philosophical resolution of the issues that seem so resolutely undecidable in his earlier writings obscures the central importance of paradox and undecidability throughout his work. The importance of undecidability for Bayle cannot, because of its very nature, be decisively clinched: as he observes in his *Dictionnaire* article on Pyrrhonistic scepticism, doubtful questioning is essential, but this also requires us 'to doubt if it is necessary to doubt' (DHC, Pyrrho, C). The persistent exceptionalism of Jews and Judaism in Bayle's writings nonetheless serves as a stubborn reminder of his philosophical resistance to closure.

Recent commentators have also made much of apparent shifts in Bayle's late work in his thinking on conscience. According to Mori and Anthony McKenna, in his final writings Bayle no longer argued for the limitless rights of the erring conscience, but emphasized rather the self-evidence of the fundamental and universal truths of moral rationalism (Mori 1999, 305–18; McKenna 2012, 93–98). Hickson, meanwhile, argues that in his late writings Bayle finally completes his intellectual journey towards a full 'secularization of conscience' (Hickson 2018). Several of his statements in these late works—such as his observation in the *Réponse* that 'a Spinozist king', or in other words a religiously non-aligned and possibly even atheist ruler, would be more likely than any Christian ruler to provide protection from partisan dogmatism and intolerance—certainly seem at first sight to suggest a turn towards rationalism (RQP: OD III, 954–5, 1011–12). Such interpretations, though, fail to take account of the charged polemical context of Bayle's writing after 1700. Bayle was engaged in an intellectual battle against adversaries who used some of the same conceptual resources as him, not in support of toleration but—on Bayle's interpretation at least—against it. These contested resources included the notion of conscience itself, which, as we have noted, John Locke (and also his *rationaux* allies) marshalled in justification of the hypocritically selective pseudo-toleration—again, as Bayle saw it—of the Glorious Revolution. Against this backdrop, and holding in mind the characteristic mobility and inconclusivity of so much of his writing and also his sharp critique of Spinoza, it seems more plausible to read Bayle's suggestion that Spinozistic atheism might be politically preferable to any kind of Christian rule not as some sort of final political testament, but rather as yet another provocative paradox.

A central theme of the third part of the *Réponse* is the barbarism frequently committed in the name of 'conscience'. It is in contrast to this, Bayle suggests, that the regulation of the public domain by a secular authority unswayed by appeals to religious conscience—such as a 'Spinozist king'—would be preferable. Among those who do terrible things in the name of conscience, he cites the example of Jews, who, he alleges, 'according to a principle of conscience only show the right path, or the way to the fountain, to those of their own religion, and consider every harm they can inflict on Christians as a good deed' (RQP: OD III, 986). This is a strikingly illiberal sweeping statement about Jews, to say the least, and one that cannot easily be reconciled with the presentation of Bayle as a straightforwardly progressive foundational thinker of 'Radical Enlightenment'. Jews here clearly occupy a position in Bayle's thought that is emblematic of a severely distorted conception of conscience. It is also clear that he is here using the word conscience in a very different sense than in the *Commentaire philosophique*, where conscience refers to the inner light of ethical judgment, which for Jews and Jews alone was overwritten by the unquestionable divine authority of the Mosaic law. That argument is readily forgotten by twenty-first-century readers of Bayle, but in his own milieu it was a commonplace, and an area of common ground between him and his *rationaux* adversaries. His description of Jewish obstructionism towards Christians as justified by conscience would have been immediately perceived by Le Clerc and his allies as a sharply ironic highlighting of how distorted this concept could become.

By the time of his final writings, then, Bayle regarded the term 'conscience' as so widely abused as to be almost valueless. There is no sign, though, that he abandoned his belief in a human 'inner light' of wisdom and decency, equally beyond religion and beyond rational logic. This is what, in the *Commentaire*, he meant by true conscience (as opposed to false or erring conscience), and appealing to it remained fundamental to his case for toleration. Bayle was open, in his non-dogmatic and pragmatic intellectual fashion, to conceiving of this inner light in varied ways, including as moral rationalism; the limited efficacy of that persuasive strategy was, though, glaringly obvious to him, as the moral rationalism of the *rationaux* in his view led straight back to intolerance. A faith-based understanding of true conscience, though, rested on similarly mysterious and insecure foundations. The textual container of those mysteries was the Old Testament, and the human reminders of them, down to Bayle's own time, were the Jews.

2.5 Conclusion: Bayle, Judaism and the Enlightenment

Bayle considers toleration in later writings, as a number of scholars in varying ways have noted, most importantly as a practical—or, to put it another way, political—problem, rather than as an issue that is soluble in theological or philosophical terms (Van der Lugt 2016, 243; García-Alonso 2017, 2021, 97). His demonstration in the *Commentaire philosophique* that appeal to the rights of the erring conscience did not provide a solid basis for universal opposition to toleration showed that the search for such a conclusive intellectual solution ultimately led to an impasse. The urgency of finding a way forward, though, was all the more keenly felt by Bayle, though, when he himself faced a double-pronged onslaught of intolerance from religious dogmatists and rationalists simultaneously. One way forward was to insist on the priority of actions over words. This, as Van der Lugt has shown, was an important argument lying behind Bayle's 'obscenity': censorship and euphemism around sex, he believed, were a hypocritical distraction from what really mattered in this domain, which was moral behaviour (2018a, 725–33). Bayle argued similarly with respect to toleration. His most explicit articulation of this argument, it is significant to note, was through the life of a Jew: the fifteenth-century Sephardic philosopher Isaac Abrabanel.

Abrabanel's great fault, Bayle observed at end of the *Dictionnaire* article on him, was that he was 'too sensitive' to the persecutions that the Jews, including Abrabanel himself, had suffered. These historical memories animated him with such fury towards Christians that 'he barely wrote a single book which was not stamped by his desire for vengeance'. His behaviour, however, was very different: 'the implacable hatred that he expressed towards Christians while writing did not prevent him from living with them in a civil, pleasant and gracious manner' (DHC, Abrabanel). Bayle's criticism to Abrabanel's excessive sensitivity is surely ironic, intended rather to signal how understandable his hostility to Christians was, given the experiences of Jews in the early decades of the Spanish Inquisition. Simultaneously,

however, he portrays Abrabanel as standing outside the ethical norms of Christian culture. Forgiveness—a paramount ethical value in Christianity, and fundamental to Bayle's hope that a pathway to the mutual toleration of French Protestants and Catholics might be found despite the long history of violence between them—has no place in Abrabanel's fiery anti-Christian rhetoric. Inexplicably but thankfully, though, in his actual dealings with Christians he was exemplary.

Jews, then, could serve for Bayle as a positive model. To conclude from this that he was an admirer of Jews, though, would be to miss the point of his argumentative logic. Abrabanel was such a compelling example of generous behaviour contradicting hard-hearted beliefs precisely because, for Bayle, Jews were quintessentially representative of rigid obedience to the Mosaic Law. His cordiality towards Christians is therefore strikingly paradoxical, and reinforces the wider paradoxes of faith and reason that pervade the *Dictionnaire*. There is nothing in any way resembling a voice of conscience that leads Abravanel to behave decently towards his Christian neighbours. Bayle does not spell this point out, because he does not need to: the conception of Judaism as a religion in which there is no space for conscience is, as we have seen, a fundamental assumption not only of Bayle himself but also of his wider intellectual milieu. Abravanel's behaviour towards Christians is, precisely because of this, a choice example of the baffling mysteries of human existence with which Bayle was so preoccupied and fascinated.

The idea that Judaism was inherently and fundamentally impervious to the ethical framework on which toleration was based remained a prominent outlook among leading figures of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Voltaire, the most famous apostle of toleration in eighteenth-century France, repeatedly portrayed Jewish legalism and barbarism as the antithesis of his own positive values (Sutcliffe 1998, 2003a, 231–46). Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who has the equivalent status for eighteenth-century Germany, seems at first sight to be very different: the eponymous hero of his play *Nathan der Weise* (1779), his most famous dramatic plea for toleration, was famously based on his close friend, the leading Jewish intellectual Moses Mendelssohn. Nathan, however, espouses a brand of universalism that is not only denuded of any Jewish content but is rather the antithesis of the pervasive eighteenth-century Enlightenment conception of Judaism. Like Spinoza for Bayle, Nathan and perhaps also Mendelssohn for Lessing were of interest not at Jews but rather as transformed post-Jews (Sutcliffe 2013).

Bayle's exceptionalist approach to Judaism does not, then, set him apart. Although the intricate argumentative ends to which he puts this exceptionalism are extremely distinctive, the Bible-based assumptions that underlie his thinking on Jews and Judaism were broadly shared by most leading European intellectuals of the Enlightenment era (Sutcliffe 2020, 62–106). A turn towards sincerity, and above all sincerity towards one's own conscience, was central to the ethical thinking of this period. Mara van der Lugt has pithily summarized this as a shift from 'truth' to 'truthfulness', which, she shows, links Bayle at the beginning of the Enlightenment with Kant at its end (2018b). For Kant, as for Bayle, this ethical primacy of autonomous truthfulness was the very antithesis of Jewish legalism. The triumph of 'pure

moral religion', and its embrace by Jews, would amount, Kant famously declared, to 'the euthanasia of Judaism' (Kant 1992, 95).

We live today in an age of renewed ethical subjectivism, in which appeals to 'my truth' abound in the public sphere. Bayle's late writings on conscience, in which he is so keenly aware of how slippery this notion could be, can perhaps here offer valuable insights for our own times. His exceptionalist thinking on Jews and Judaism in this regard, though, sits very uncomfortably in the political and cultural context of the twenty-first century. The view that individual conscience is an ethical foundation intrinsically absent from Judaism would today generally be considered untenable. One important reason for this is that over the past two centuries, since the emergence of the Reform tradition in early nineteenth-century Germany, Judaism has itself become an extremely internally contested and varied religion. The intellectual heirs of Da Costa—intrinsically 'bad Jews' according to Bayle's logic, and also in the eyes of many Orthodox Jews—now have their own synagogues, espousing new and diverse interpretations of the Mosaic Law, rabbinic authority, and the relationship of the individual to the religious community and to the state.

The belief that the Jews, as 'God's chosen people', are of exceptional importance and require exceptional consideration, continues, though, to play a very important role in international politics. Evangelical Christian Zionists, through organizations such as the five-million-strong Christians United for Israel, exert significant influence on the Middle East policy of the United States and several other countries. This form of biblicist exceptionalism is closest in spirit, in Bayle's day, to the prophetic millenarianism of Jurieu. Controversies over the exceptionalist treatment of Jewish-related issues also figure prominently, however, at the interface of Western liberal moralism and those cultural systems—especially Islam—which are most commonly cast as its rhetorical adversary. This can be seen in arguments over the nature and seriousness of antisemitism in relation to Islamophobia and other prejudices, and over the pedagogical prioritization and political contestation of Holocaust memory. This clash was also in evidence at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, where Western efforts to foreground gay rights were pitted against a predominantly Arab focus on Palestinian rights, which, these expressions of solidarity indirectly suggested, were largely 'beyond the conscience' of the West for reasons closely connected with deep-seated exceptionalist thinking on Jews (Sutcliffe 2020, 274–83; Sutcliffe 2022).

Bayle certainly does not offer us any easy untangling of these complex theologico-political knots. The insight that he offers, however, as several scholars have observed, does not lie in his conclusions, but in the anti-dogmatic open-endedness and undecidability of his method (Lennon 1999, 183–6; Whelan 2010; Russo 2019). His indefatigable grappling with the paradoxes and knots that most concerned him, and his absolute refusal of any evasions or false solutions of them, might, then, offer some sort of model for how we should approach these abiding cross-cultural muddles of our own time.